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the opinion

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APRIL, 1962

ALIENATION AND REDEMPTION IN THE MODERN NOVEL

by John Hillis &
Anthony Yu

The twentieth century has been aptly captioned "The Age of Anxiety," and the predicament of modern man is almost a universal theme of contemporary literature. The muse of the age speaks of "man's dreaded loss of identity, of a desperate need to make contact with fellow man, and with the world and with whatever may be beyond the world. Above all, it speaks of a God grown silent." (*TIME*, March 31, 1961) The modern mood of despair is generally attributed to the disillusionment brought about by the two world wars. But actually the cancer of anxiety has much deeper historical roots reaching back to the nineteenth century.

It is almost a truism to observe that the prevailing atmosphere of the previous century was one of arrogant optimism in man's perfectibility and inevitable progress. Religious liberalism, philosophic idealism, economic determinism, and scientific naturalism all vied with one another to inaugurate the Kingdom of Man on earth. But beneath the surface of such optimism were the under currents of protest. In religion Søren Kierkegaard raised his prophetic voice to re-emphasize the radical evil of the human being and to declaim the "massification" of man. Against the superficial universalism of Tennyson and the depersonalized vocationalism of Huxley, Matthew Arnold deplored

the strange disease of modern life,
With its sick hurry, its divided aims,
Its heads o'ertaxed, its palsied hearts...
(The Scholar-Gypsy)

The writings of A.C. Swinburne and James Thompson continued to reflect an insecure and uneasy conscience disturbed by "the withdrawing roar" of "The Sea of Faith." These precursors of the modern mind have been confirmed in their judgments by the calamities of our era and find their fullest expression in contemporary philosophy and art.

As the artistic products of our culture abound in the affirmations of man's essential alientation, they prove to be useful means to reveal the folly of man's self-sufficiency. But whether we can say that modern art forms present an adequate redemption from this folly is a question which requires careful scrutiny in the light of Christianity. An analysis of three major modern novels will lend us added insights into the angst mentality and its possible therapeutic value.

ANTHONY YU graduated in English and History from Houghton College in 1960. JOHN HILLIS received his B.A. in 1961 in English Literature from Wheaton College. The two have been friends since they went to sixth grade together in Taiwan.

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EDITORIAL

Christ revolutionized the thought of His day by placing the emphasis on what a person IS, rather than what a person DOES. Certainly a man's actions are important, but they are governed by his total being. The emphasis is not primarily on the action itself, but on the man's inward person (his relationship to God, his heart attitude).

This month, two activities are approaching which are usually regarded as strictly secular: politics and recreation. Elections for Student Council and class officers will be held in the middle of the month, and the Spring Banquet is planned for April 28.

Often a spirit of apathy, or even of disdain, can overtake a Christian when he considers activities which do not seem to be as relevant to the Gospel as others with which he is concerned. Certainly these things, in themselves, are not vital; the world makes the mistake of elevating these things to a height that they do not deserve.

However, we as Christians bring the totality of our Christian experience to bear in all of our activities. We as Christians may assume our rightful responsibility in choosing future leaders for the Seminary; we as Christians may spend an evening in wholesome social activity with our wives and friends.

The entire student council (including the class officers) is playing an ever-increasing role in determining the future plans of the Seminary. These representatives of the student body must be chosen with care; there is no room for apathy here.

The Spring Banquet is the one time of year when the students and faculty can share the common experience of coming together for an evening of relaxation and fellowship, using social graces in a Christian setting; there is no room for disdain here.

Let us thank God that we are able to participate as Christians, in the activities of politics and recreation, living life to the fullest for His honor and glory.

pcd

NOVEL (con't)

William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying is the story of a journey undertaken to bury Addie Bundren and to get some new teeth. But behind this story which is "at once grotesque and elementally traditional lies a search for a lost center of value, a direct probing of ultimate questions and a futile search for human meaning." (Hyatt Waggoner, "William Faulkner's Passion Week of the Heart," in The Tragic Vision and the Christian Faith, edit. by Nathan Scott, Jr.). The character in whom the problem is centralized is Addie and in her person we are confronted by the questions of man's nature and destiny. For her people are "the mere momentary clottings of arrested motion," and "the reason for living is to get ready to stay dead a long time." Hers is a quest for meaning and reality behind a word or a personality that is "a significant shape profoundly without life like an empty door frame." In rejecting the children she bears, she rejects life itself as without final meaning or direction. At the birth of her first son, she reminisces:

I knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it...And when I thought that this seem to be the only way I could get ready to stay dead, I would hate my father for having ever planted me.

What then is the answer to life? How is one to act in the face of meaninglessness? Hyatt Waggoner has suggested that self-assertion is Addie's answer. She beats her children and thinks: "Now you are aware of me."

She responds to the presence and sufferings of the world not in resignation and humility and the desire to make of suffering accepted a pre-condition of grace, a necessary part of a desired imitation of Christ, but with bitter and violent rebellion and rejection not only of the world but of others and of love.

In this respect she reminds one of a Captain Ahab or Heathcliff in the futile struggle for domination which can eventuate only in death. Existence from a Christian stand point is a journey through life to death and through death to life, and in it an ultimate solution in self-assertion cannot be found. As I Lay Dying cannot be taken as representing a realistic slice of life. Its message lies too deeply in the recesses of symbolic expression.

John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath is, on the surface, an accurate description of the conditions which existed in the Californian migrant camps, and taken as propaganda, it is a compelling polemic for social reform. But beyond this, it portrays the gradual deterioration of human dignity which accompanies impoverish circumstances. Steinbeck's tale is an account of the exodus of the Joads from the Egypt of Oklahoma to the promised land of California. California, however, turns out to be a hellish nightmare of increasingly straitened conditions rather than a land flowing with milk and honey. In this context Steinbeck attempts to proclaim a redemption for man.

The theology of the Grapes of Wrath is presented expositively in the words of Jim Casy (Jesus Christ?), a Bible-belt evangelist turned social prophet, and implicitly in the lives of the Joad family. But Casy is the spiritual descendent of Whitman rather than Christ when he says of immorality:

Maybe it ain't sin. Maybe it's just the way folks is. Maybe we been whippin' the hell out of ourselves for nothing...There ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue. There's just stuff people do. It's all part of the same thing. And some of the things folks do is nice, and some ain't nice, but that's as far as any man got a right to say...

Steinbeck is explicit in denying any personal morality when he relegates it to the level of relativism. In another place, Casy says: "Well, for anybody else it was a mistake but if you think it was a sin, then it's a sin. A fella builds his own sins right up from the groun'."

Steinbeck also reveals the redemptive side of his concern in the character of Casy. Casy's conversion came in a moment of intuitive insight when he suddenly realizes what Steinbeck presents as the life philosophy and ethical standard of the Joad family.

There was the hills, an' there was me, an' we wasn't separate no more. We want one thing. An' that one thing was holy. An' I got thinkin', only it wasn't thinkin', it was deeper than thinkin'. I got thinkin' how we was holy when we was one thin', an' mankin' was holy when it was one thing. An' it only got unholy when one mis'able little fella got the hit in his teeth an' run off his own way,

kickin' and draggin' and fightin'. Fella like that bust the holiness. But when they're all workin' together, not one fella for another fella, but one fella kind of harnessed to the whole shebang--that's right, that's holy.

This is the theme that Steinbeck weaves through his novel, and as situations worsen it is only dependence upon each other that keeps the Joad family from total spiritual bankruptcy. The story surges toward a moving climax as Rossharn offers her breast, intended for her stillborn baby, to a starving man. It is out of her own need that she gives life; the profound suffering is met by a transcendent flash of selfless love. Here the nobility of Steinbeck's ethic -though partial- shines resplendently, as he affirms that "two are better than one; for if they fall, the one will lif' up his fellow." What he has presented is Christian community without Christian foundations.

The final novel, and perhaps most acutely revealing of our times, is Albert Camus' The Fall. In the form of a literary monologue, Jean-Baptiste Sarracene recorded his success as a Parisian lawyer. He had defended with his oratorical gifts the poor, the victimized, and the more romantic criminals. He had enjoyed the respect and admiration which his devotion to good deeds and charitable causes had aroused in the public. "Few creatures were more natural than I," he mused. "I was altogether in harmony with life, fitting into it from top to bottom...some higher decrees served to raise me above the daily routine and I literally soared for a period of years." Yet ease in everything brought him satisfaction in nothing, and he embarked upon a futile Endymion quest for permanence in happiness. Then, without warning, he underwent an experience which stripped him of his moral comfort and self-esteem. As he was crossing the Seine late at night a young woman committed suicide by jumping from a bridge into the river. Although he heard the splash of her body and her cry, he failed to turn back and try to help. The memory of this moment of cowardice, kept agonizingly alive by a mysterious laugh which he occasionally thought he could hear, haunted Sarracene. His world of primal innocence and ideal adjustment disintegrated with the knowledge of his own failure. He sought escape in different forms of debauchery but none yielded release. Eventually he gave up his law practice to become what he called a "judge penitent." In this role of modern "ancient mariner," he bottomholed strangers in a bar and confessed his moral failure to them in such a way as to accuse them in turn of similar cowardice. His story of his own life became a mirror held up to other men's lives and in this he found mastery.

Camus in The Fall is confronting himself with the deceitfulness of human nature. "I have accepted the duplicity instead of being upset about it," he says, yet he is forced to admit that "for anyone who is alone, without God and without a master, the weight of days is dreadful. Hence one must choose a master, God being out of style." It is this awareness that the world is morally ambiguous in its essence and that the fall of man is in reality "human guilt become a "judge-penitent." As such, he regained some assurance and moral comfort. But in the end, even this expedient failed him and his final words were uttered in cynical despair: "It is too late now. It will always be too late. Fortunately!"

That the preceeding voices have given adequate expression to the modern awareness of evil is unquestioned. Furthermore, we can detect regression in the therapeutic value of the three novels from

Steinbeck (published first) through Faulkner to Camus (published last). The most recent work seems to offer no concrete solution at all, though we would note a definite movement away from total meaninglessness and absurdity in a comparison of The Fall and Camus' earlier output, The Stranger. There has been much conjecture as to where this movement would have carried the author had he lived, and some have even suggested the Christian option as a final resting place. To derive this from The Fall, however, involves dubious exegesis and unwarranted speculation.

Faulkner's solution is difficult to grasp mainly because one is never certain whether this nemesis of the critics is more interested in offering a remedy to man's ills or in playing with symbols. But if we were to accept As I Lay Dying as having any serious intent at all, and Waggoner's interpretation seems the most likely, we still cannot approve of self-assertion as a worthy panacea. Nietzsche's superhumanism leads in the end to annihilation, not salvation.

Steinbeck, writing before the Second World War, offers a more positive view of life. His gospel of human inter-dependency in order to preserve community is a step in the right direction. But disinterested love apart from a genuine Christian motivation cannot be exercised with any consistency or normativeness in a sinful society.

The dilemma presented to man by the novelist is either abandonment to terror or existential affirmation. But accepting the Christian Faith, we will, as Amos Wilder has observed recently,

take up a position against both false hopes and unjustified negation. Against the latter it keeps open the promise not only of the transcendent kingdom of heaven but also of mundane horizons of blessing contingent on righteousness. Against false hopes it reminds men of what substance they are made...The Christian can go part way with attack on various forms of unwarranted self-sufficiency and elation. But when disillusionment and meaninglessness exceed their useful corrective role...*

the Christian must not hesitate to testify to the world "the faith, hope, and charity" which only the Gospel of Christ can bestow.

* Amos Wilder, "The Modern Wrestle with Negation," In Christianity and Crisis, Jan. 22, 1962.

GROUPS

by Richard Peace

To which group do you belong? Are your allegiances attached to one of the groups with an external organization such as Inter-Varsity, Young Life, Open Air Campaigners, Campus Crusade, or Navigators? Or is your life structured around one of the student-motivated groups: the international students Bible study, the drama group, African Enterprise, the Student Council or the opinion? Perhaps you are a member of a group with no pretense of structure but within which you find your friends. There are the dorm groups, the coffee club, the married students social set, the language

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students, etc. Or is seminary merely your morning activity with your life really revolving around your church?

It is no new thing to point out that Fuller Seminary is ordered about a system of group structures into which each student is expected to fit and within which he is expected to find his values, his friends, and the organization of his life.

What is the reason for this multiplicity of groups? Is it because Fuller Seminary has no church tie to provide the central structuring agency as in the denomination seminaries? The students drawn here are often those in whose background one of the supra-denominational groups (e.g. IVCF) has had a great influence. Continuing in such a tradition, out of interest or gratitude, they align themselves in seminary with these groups. Perhaps the reason is bound up with the pressures involved in obtaining a Fuller education. The rigor of the courses and the fierce competition for the good grades which will open future church doors or educational possibilities brings such a structuring of life. One's time is limited by studies so one is forced to a narrow choice of activities. But then perhaps the desire to "fit," to be warmly accepted by others, causes groups to naturally develop. Within a group this needed and desired acceptance is found. It takes a great deal of courage to be a lone wolf. But all this may be too complex. The choice of a group may be due simply to an interest in its functions. Or perhaps one's future work determines the choice. Nevertheless, all of these factors have influenced the rise of groups, different blocks coming into being for various reasons.

But ought we to be really concerned over this group structure? The answer to this question lies in an analysis of the fruits groups produce. The first result is that there tends to be little mobility from group to group. One chooses an organization and allows his life to be fully oriented around it. Indeed the group might have branches in various directions (the dorm 190 group began the opinion and the drama group among other things) but despite the function, the people involved tend to remain the same. This means then secondly, that there is little communication between the groups. Thirdly, the natural consequence of this lack of interaction brings an undesired fruit, namely judgment upon those in other groups. And judgment causes competition, resentments, and hard feelings. Certainly it does not yield up love between individuals. For example, IVCF is a reasonably tight-knit group ministering on college campuses. This group tends to picture itself as reaching students with a mature, reasonable, "un-gimmicked" approach. They (or rather "we" as the author has worked with IVCF) tend to hold a bit of disdain for the supposedly more sensational "technique" approach of Campus Crusade. A value judgment prevails in IVCF with respect to those of this other group. It might be added that it seems that Campus Crusade also holds a value judgment. It views IVCF as indeed having a mature and reasonable approach but one which is not too effective. Many other examples might be cited. There is tension between the "serious" students and the "activist" students. In the former group are the older, often married students who have had a chance to see lots of life and have settled down to a definite goal, namely seminary. They wonder about the multitude of activities which consume the time of those who have done nothing but attend school all their lives, forgetting their past and all it contained. There is ill feeling between the "spiritual" group (those whose activities center mainly around the quest for a "deeper" life) and the "released" group (those who find Christian significance in a number of areas).

And what is the answer to all of this? We gravitate to the structure of a group, there we order our lives, and as a result we find ourselves judging others from the perspective of the group. One thing seems obvious, to negate judgments from a limited perspective, one must be mobile, i.e., one must be willing to communicate significantly with other groups. An IVCF staff member could sit in profitably on a Campus Crusade open meeting. Communication breeds understanding which in turn removes the tendency to judge. Then furthermore an effort must be made to get behind the outward distinctives of the group. Young Lifers have a particular language, are noted for robust activities which often result in dorm mayhem, and are thought to be more concerned about the Dodgers' averages than Calvin's view of the sacraments. A judgment made on the basis of these outward distinctives is different from one made after sitting down with a Young Life leader and hearing him speak with warm excitement of how one of his high schoolers finally opened up to him and gave him the chance to present the Lord. Let us not judge individuals on the basis of their group tag.

It is difficult to escape provincialism. It is easier to be in the "best" group. But being "best" has the strange result of alienating one from all others save the group. We must strive to transcend the easy path of judgment to the thorny route of understanding.

Letters to the Editors....

VICE ADVICE

Fuller, unlike other evangelical colleges and seminaries, has no group of do's and don't's" to control students' lives. And while students from stricter backgrounds might well appreciate the freedom, it seems good to raise the question whether this freedom is being well used. While movies and books may be good things, there seems to be a sort of fermented goodness about books like The Tropic of Cancer or films like La Dolce Vita.

A "Fuller Index" is a rather convulsive attempt at a solution, yet someone should plead for a "conscience index", for there appears to be a real danger of our becoming Lots. When we have condensed Quiet Times and spend more time in shows each week than in the Scriptures, whose image are we being molded after: Christ's or Alfred Hitchcock's? Paul's exhortation in Philippians 4 to think on pure and excellent and true things has no less bearing for us than for the Philippians. And why, also, fear the title, "Puritan"? As someone has pointed out, Puritan was "a useful term of abuse by those who disliked any stress on a moral life." We, of all men, should strive for unrepachable moral lives, wisely using our freedom.

BOB IVES

FOR WHOM DOES A SCHOOL EXIST?

Every educational institution has some underlying rationale or goal for its existence. Usually schools are maintained to serve the community, a certain social class, religious group, or to bring together a specialized faculty.

Have you ever heard of a school that exists for the students? Or better yet, have you ever had the privilege of attending such an institution?

Administrators who initiate their goals with the students in mind reason that if there were no students there would be no classes, staff, buildings, grounds, library, faculty or administrators! None of these assests can become ends in themselves.

The intellectual, physical, and spiritual goals of the school are established upon the felt needs of the students. What do the students feels is needed in courses in the curriculum, for chapel, in a library, for the campus? This position requires that the administration initiate dialogue with students--individually as well as with representative groups.

For whom do we (as we wear the hat of church administrator) perceive that our church is sustained? Do we sense that if there were no individuals there would not be any buildings, staff, choir, or even worship services?

For whom do you visualize that the Seminary (and your church) exists? Should it be student-centered?

JOHN KOEKER

THE COUNCIL CORNER

Welcome to New Students-

I will take this opportunity to welcome the following new students in the Fuller family: Harold Ankeny, Sheridan Byerly, George Carpenter, Jacob Coss, Clifford Listug, Neal Nuenburg, Otis Payne, Ronald Richardson, Hal Roberts, Arden Snyder. Welcome to Fuller Seminary. May the years of preparation here thoroughly equip each of you for His service in the future.

Lyceum Committee-

The Student Council has recently created a committee to coordinate the extra curricular activities of our student life. This committee will be known as the Lyceum Committee. This committee, headed by senior chairman, John Bray, will also plan various activities of a cultural and educational nature.

The New Image-

No doubt you have noticed the sharp new look exhibited by the Young Life men from dorm 180. This is something which should be commended because it lifts the standard for the whole student body. Sharp dressing is a mark of self respect. I express my personal appreciation to every student who has in a similar way done his part to elevate the standard of dress at Fuller.

Richard Anderson

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